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Report Recommends Steps To Increase Protection Against Spies

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A secret report ordered by President Reagan recommends that the United States shore up its protection against foreign spies by adding agents to follow the growing number of visiting foreign officials, a newspaper says.

The report also suggests cutting down on the travel flexibility of foreigners, the Los Angeles Times reported in Sunday editions.

In addition, it recommends measures to improve the nation's physical security and to standardize personnel security clearance criteria among various agencies, the Times said.

The report, completed in August, was overseen by Central Intelligence Agency director William Casey.

The Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board has been assigned to consider whether a central counterintelligence organization should be formed to coordinate activities of disparate groups ranging from the CIA to the Department of Energy, which oversees nuclear weapons research.

That board is headed by former ambassador and White House counselor Anne Armstrong of Texas and includes 18 private citizens.

Some intelligence officials believe a centralized agency would better combat spying threats. Others say it would rekindle old fears of a government which, under the guise of counter-espionage, might persecute its critics, the Times said.

"It would become the focus not only of liberal attacks for the rest of the century, reviving ghosts of the FBI files and (former FBI chief J. Edgar) Hoover, but also a target for penetration by the Soviets," the Times quoted one unidentified government official as saying.

However, the newspaper said there is a unanimous view in government that the current decentralized system needs to be improved.

"There was and still is no one place in our government where the president can ask what is the true nature of the KGB threat to us, whether it is a low-grade problem or really worrying," one source told the Times. "But he can ask the strength of the Soviet economy, Soviet military order of battle and practically any other thing of the intelligence community."

Currently, the FBI gathers counterintelligence information in the United States but cannot analyze all such data collected by other national agencies.

Similar limits are placed on the CIA.

"For stopping the technology leaks to Moscow," one official said, "maybe Casey should run all the counterintelligence efforts. But now his authority stops at the water's edge, while the FBI and other agencies have the domestic responsibility."